

THE SHAPING OF ISRAELI IDENTITY

Myth, Memory and Trauma

Edited by
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Zarathustra in Jerusalem: Nietzsche and the “New Hebrews”

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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900) is regarded as one of the philosophers who has had the greatest influence, since the late nineteenth century, on European cultural and political discourse. This fact is borne out by recent research on the reception of Nietzsche by diverse national cultures and political ideologies.¹ There is clearly something special about Nietzsche that enabled his thought to exert such an impact on divergent political streams, on artists, educators, political leaders and philosophers – whether religious or atheist, left or right-wing, individualists or collectivists. By examining some of the main stages in the gradual acceptance of Nietzsche within modern Hebrew culture, we can also discover some major conflicts and ongoing problems which have marked modern Jewish nationalism from its inception. These turning points and tensions fuelled the construction of myths which were refined in the crucible of Nietzschean discourse.

In the dynamics of ideological development, the influence that philosophers exert on movements can take diverse forms. There are, for example, philosophers who have deliberately sought to proselytize their ideas by publishing books and manifestos, fostering disciples or establishing journals. A good illustration of this type of thinker was Karl Marx, who was active on three different planes – philosophical, ideological and political. Nietzsche belongs to a very different category. He worked solely on the philosophical plane and was not involved in politics as such. Nietzsche's radical style had a greater impact on his readers than did his ideology, while certain revolutionary elements in his philosophy were adopted and even served to intensify specific attitudes among his audience. He made no conscious effort to disseminate his theories but was nevertheless adopted by disparate ideological camps.

The case of Nietzsche and modern Hebrew culture is particularly fascinating since he has often been seen as one of the key philosophi-

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cal sources for National Socialist ideology. Concepts which he coined, such as “the blond beast”, “the Superman” or “slave morality” have been taken out of context and misused for political ends. This is one more reason why the significance of Nietzsche in Hebrew culture before and after the Second World War needs to be placed in historical context.² Nietzschean ideas like the “Superman” or the “Will to Power” can alter their meaning in translation, depending on the strategies adopted in a particular cultural discourse and social framework.

The question of Nietzsche's influence on modern Jewish culture and nationalism needs to be distinguished from his attitude towards Judaism and the Jews, though the connection between these issues is not entirely coincidental. Nietzsche's admiration for the Hebrew Bible and the strength of character of the Jewish people is well known, while his distaste for priestly Judaism stemmed from the fact that it was the basis for Christianity, which he despised.³ His comments on Judaism and on the Jews are scattered throughout his writings. In *The Will to Power*, for example, he comments on “The Jewish instinct of the ‘Chosen’: ... they claim all the virtues for themselves without further ado, and count the rest of the world their opposites; a profound sign of vulgar soul”.⁴

From the turn of the century, Nietzschean ideas, whether veiled or overt, permeated the mainstream of Jewish philosophy, political ideas and cultural discourse in modern Hebrew literature and poetry. The main figures in early Zionism, whether left or right-wing, secular or religious, pioneers of the Second and Third *Aliya* or ideologues of the Jewish underground LEHI and the “Canaanite” movement came under his influence before 1948. After the establishment of the Israeli state, however, the “new Hebrew” became the “Sabra” (ideal type of the indigenous Israeli) and the passionate drive to build a “new man” made way for a more personal outlook. Nietzscheanism ebbed though it did not altogether disappear.

The first Hebrew essay on Nietzsche was written by David Neumark, a rabbi and philosopher, in 1894, and published in *From East to West*. It was entitled “Nietzsche: An introduction to the Theory of the Superman”. Neumark was a decade younger than the Zionist theorist Ahad Ha-am with whom he had close ties. He was among the first to join Herzl and he participated in the First Zionist Congress. Neumark sought to fashion what he called the “new Hebrew” in the image of the Nietzschean “Superman”. Reuben Brainin's comment is relevant in this respect: “The future generation shall not be small and weak, beaten and sickly as is this dwarfish generation, rather shall a strong and mighty generation arise, a generation of giants, a generation which shall inculcate new physical strengths and new mental capacities which we never imagined, a generation of the ‘Superman’”.

Neumark was the first to render *Übermensch* ("Superman") into the Hebrew, *adam elyon* (higher man). In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Kabbalistic book, the *Zohar* refers to a concept of *adam ilah*, which is virtually the same term.

Nietzschean concepts, as we have remarked, coined a lexicon which served a wide spectrum of ideologies. The question arises, then, as to how Nietzsche was read by disparate thinkers representing the main currents in Jewish nationalism and how they used him for their philosophical and political objectives. Which Nietzschean principles (the Will to Power, the "Superman", the transvaluation of values, the slave and master morality or the revolt against history) did they choose to emphasize and which to ignore? What was there about the Nietzschean texts which invited so many diverse readings and exerted such influence on wide circles in modern Jewish nationalism? Part of the attraction lay no doubt in his poetical and aphoristic style that can be appreciated by almost all readers. Nietzscheanism was moreover radical in both style and content, its metaphorical and symbolic form of expression inviting a multiplicity of interpretations. The distinct aspects of his "philosophy of life" (*Lebensphilosophie*) – voluntarism, will, vitality and myth – enabled thinkers who wished to break new ground or to blaze a new path to radicalize their positions.

BERDICHEVSKY: THE HEBREW NIETZSCHE?

Nietzsche's prominence as the philosopher of nihilism and of the Will to Power did not go unnoticed in the Hebrew cultural revival which was taking place in Europe at the turn of the century. This culture had evolved through the European form of Jewish national particularism. Like its European counterparts, Jewish national ideology drew on romantic tradition, attempting to restore the distant national past in order to legitimize a separate group identity. The emerging nationalism sought to justify itself through history. Ahad Ha-am was the most outstanding exponent of this historicist trend which emphasized that past generations had served to pave the road towards national redemption and progress.

Another dimension of Western cultural influence on Ahad Ha-am's Zionist thought was the humanistic nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century, which endeavoured to integrate a sense of national destiny with the longing for universality. This romantic nationalist vision of a brotherhood of nations, each with its own unique mission, was shared by Giuseppe Mazzini and Adam Mickiewicz. To Mazzini's "Third Rome", with its messianic echoes and Mickiewicz's vision of Poland as "the Christ of Nations", Ahad Ha-am added a higher sense of ethics as the universal destiny of Jewish nationalism.

Ahad Ha-am believed there was a direct line which led from the sages of Yavneh, nearly 2000 years earlier, to the modern Judaic concept of Israel's role among the nations. In his article "Good Advice", he developed the concept of "Jewish Nietzscheanism" which, as Berdichevsky claims, was not revolutionary but rather another strata in Jewish evolution.

If, therefore, we agree that the purpose is the Superman, we must then also agree that an integral part of this purpose is the Supreme People: that there exists in the world one people that is enabled by spiritual characteristics to be more ethically developed than other peoples ...⁵

Ahad Ha-am sought to create a synthesis between the concept of the Superman and the moral singularity of the Jewish people, distinguishing between the "human" and the "Aryan" aspects of Nietzschean philosophy. The "human" aspect, which could be accepted, should call, as he put it, for "the ascendancy of a human type among the chosen of the species to be above the general level". The "Aryan" aspect, which he rejected, was the belief in physical might and beauty. Possibly Ahad Ha-am's Nietzschean language was used here as a polemic weapon. What is certain is that he did not share Nietzsche's radical individualism and that he was sceptical about the Zionist vision of a "new man". His approach was one in which individuals exist for the nation rather than for themselves, something far removed from Nietzsche or the "new Hebrew Nietzscheans".

Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, like some other intellectuals, artists and critics at the turn of the century, represented another trend, closer to Nietzsche's existential philosophy. Berdichevsky had discovered Nietzsche for the first time during his studies in Berlin in 1893. In a letter to Shkapniuk written in the same year, Berdichevsky wrote:

This summer, I read much written by Friedrich Nietzsche, the man who is creating such commotion throughout Europe. Perhaps you could obtain his book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, which has made a stronger impression on me than any book I have read ... He is now in a lunatic asylum.⁶

During the next two years, which he spent in Switzerland, Berdichevsky saw himself as a pure Nietzschean, defining this concept according to the criteria of power and individualism. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "As I believe you are aware, I am a Nietzschean ... and know only might, power, power!"⁷ During the years 1897-1999, he began to change his priorities, placing a greater emphasis on the historical Jewish collectivity rather than on the individual who sanctifies his liberty.

Berdichevsky did not, however, completely abandon his German master: witness the fact that when, in 1897, he translated *Sefer Ha-hasidim*, he gave it the title *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (*Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, 1880). This was the same title as the second part of Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*. Towards the end of his life, when he gathered together all his work, Berdichevsky was careful to remove the Nietzschean quotes and themes. In 1905 he wrote in his diary:

Nietzsche's theories were not the starting point of my ideas, except insofar as I distance myself from tradition and pointed out the damage which traditional morality causes a nation *per se*; it was as though, on the path to transvaluation, I met him along the way.⁸

Like many of his contemporaries, Berdichevsky was exposed to the late nineteenth century European intellectual revolution which sought to expose and unravel the experiential elements of modern human consciousness. Gustave Le Bon's psychology of the masses, George Sorel's sociology of myth and Henri Bergson's philosophy of time; the rediscovery of Gambatista Vico's theory of *ricorso* (renewal) and renewed interest in Edward von Hartman's view of the unconscious were all part of this intellectual revolution. With its new sociological, psychological and aesthetic concepts, this upheaval exercised an important influence on the emergence of radical national consciousness in the first decade of the twentieth century. Friedrich Nietzsche's anti-historical revolt stood in the vanguard of this revolution. Historicism, romanticism, evolutionary and liberal ideas of progress had emphasized throughout the nineteenth century a view of man determined by historical development. Nietzsche sought to introduce an original anthropological approach according to which the New Man as an expression of existential nihilism is the product of eternal return.⁹

Ahad Ha-am and Berdichevsky represent two opposing traditions (Hegelian and Nietzschean) with respect to the concept of time in the historical culture of the nineteenth century. Ahad Ha-am followed Hegel in arguing that if time is infinitely open, then perpetual improvement is a viable concept; thus, the idea of progress is based on the assumption of improvement from the lowest point towards the highest. Berdichevsky, like Nietzsche, negated this value-based imposition on history which he saw as being beyond good and evil. In his view, the idea of progress was a variation of the attempt to imbue a process with inner meaning; if the main point about the Will to Power is to overcome and to intensify, then the important thing is not completing the historical process, but engaging in it. Life understood as the

Will-to-Power is the real and central need or as Berdichevsky puts it, "a powerful life, a courageous life".¹⁰ Enlightenment and education are not goals in their own right, but subject to the authority of life itself.

The "new Hebrew", as depicted by Berdichevsky, does not receive his world from an inherited culture or from history, but rather from his identification with modernity through the adoption of a particular lifestyle. There are no more inherited themes from the culture of the past that can be taken for granted, no more illusions about rational development or normative ethics. Instead, he offers an unmediated view of the modern world as an *aesthetic* experience that should be affirmed. Since reality is dynamic, the human being must not rest on his laurels. He must identify with the rhythm of the world, which is the Will to Power and with himself as subject. This radical existentialism adopted by Berdichevsky, in the footsteps of Nietzsche, contained a new form of individualist ethics which emphasized the relation of man to himself rather than to his fellow man.¹¹

Berdichevsky's voluntarist, revolutionary conception of the past was critical of the approach taken by the "science of Judaism" as represented by the German Jewish historians Leopold Zunz and Zachariah Frankel. He respected, however, Abraham Geiger "who with all his great and tempestuous spirit would have desired to renew Israel in the present, rather than making do with its life in the past as did Zunz and his faction". Within his dynamic conception of the present, Berdichevsky, following Nietzsche, abandoned the guiding hand of historicism, romanticism, enlightenment and progress. Instead, he preferred the dimension of the actual present, the existential experience as such, over historical understanding.

During his stay in Weimar, Berdichevsky visited Nietzsche's home several times. In this twilight period of the father of the "Will-to-Power", Nietzsche's sister forbade visitors to come to their home. In a letter from 1898 to Yosef Melnik, Berdichevsky writes: "There, at the periphery, live Nietzsche and his sister. The guilt of this great man will always be with me".¹² His son, Emanuel Ben-Gurion, writes in his memoirs, *Reshut Ha-yahid* (The Private Domain):

During the years when he was writing the novel, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky spent several months in Weimar (the autumn and winter of 1898), where he visited, among other places, the Nietzsche archives which were being established by the philosopher's sister, Elisabeth Förster – Nietzsche. (Nietzsche, who had been insane for eight years, was still alive, and visitors to the house where his possessions were displayed on the first floor could hear the sick man pacing restlessly in his room on the floor above.) The year after Berdichevsky's death, my mother and I vis-

ited Weinmar and viewed the archives. The old woman remembered her meeting with Berdichevsky twenty-five years earlier and recalled a particular scene from a novel, *The Leave Taker*, which he had told her about. The hero of the novel, or his friend, negates the Torah scroll and stabs it with a knife, and blood spurts from the parchment. I cannot cast any light on this - the manuscript has disappeared, or perhaps been destroyed.¹³

Out of this kind of existential experience the "new man" emerged who is *not* motivated by rational assumptions and who abandons accepted ethical distinctions of good and evil. The rebel against history identifies with a world which is the fruit of his own labour, and he thereby becomes authentic rather than decadent. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of the "new man" is the quest for *authenticity* - a search which was common to philosophers at the turn of the century. Authenticity was a response to the alienation that existed between the individual and his world. Berdichevsky bemoans the fact that, "there is nothing that unites us in all the corners of our souls, in our characteristics. There is no total or perfect unity".¹⁴ Turn-of-the-century modernism cultivated the personal style of the "new man", basing itself on the Nietzschean theory of perspectivism which argued that there are no facts, only interpretations.

Berdichevsky continued in the steps of Nietzsche when he wrote: "There is no single currency, no single class and no single horizon. We do not face two paths, but hundreds of paths; not one way of living, but hundreds of ways ...".¹⁵ Nietzsche, however, was also misunderstood by Berdichevsky, when he writes in a naturalistic language: "Return to Nature, return to your Mother, to all that is alive and note that precisely as you drew nearest to Nature, to the sanctuary, you are as tall and broad as they are".¹⁶ Nietzsche did not in fact advocate the destruction of culture and a return to a natural or primitive state. Rather he sought to eliminate the dichotomy between intellect and life. Intellect must become nature and nature must be shaped by the "new man". Transvaluation is one of the merits of the "new man". In 1882, Nietzsche wrote to Lou Andreas Salome: "First, man must liberate himself from chains and lastly he must also liberate himself from this liberation". Berdichevsky's "new Hebrew" is also marked by transvaluation and self-legislation: "A man gives himself commands and treads his own path".¹⁷

In common with the Nietzschean critics of culture at the turn of the century, who sought to transform Zarathustra into a political militant, Berdichevsky faced the problem of translating an esoteric philosophy into sociological language. How could a link be forged between the individual and a revolutionary movement? This is the classic problem

of intellectuals who wish to shape a "new man" - in the final analysis, they coalesce with militant avant-garde groups and with elite movements which remain aloof from the masses. Berdichevsky's "new Hebrew" eventually joins those who, like him, foment revolution. "Days of change are coming for the nation and the individual when they shall weary from carrying their arid burden and gather strength with which to shake the foundations of their heritage and create new values, according to which a man shall feel himself to be a new creation with a new soul; man must wake from his slumber and abrogate those things which he was hitherto careful to maintain".¹⁸

The tradition of heroism in nineteenth century European culture, celebrated by Thomas Carlyle, prepared the hero to represent a new type of human nurtured by national movements at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Berdichevsky sees the individual as a partner in this movement for renewal, realizing the fundamental principle of nationalism and symbolizing the new society to be established on the ruins of the old. At the turn of the century, many intellectuals and artists had already turned their backs on conservative nationalism, which relied on the tradition of generations, privilege and rank. They constructed instead a *revolutionary* nationalism based on the present, on action and the primacy of the individual. Similarly, Berdichevsky developed a secular existentialism which entailed a new perception of nationalism, emphasizing the individual rather than the community, the present rather than the past and aesthetics rather than ethics.

In his dissertation "On the Relationship between Ethics and Aesthetics", written when he was 30, Berdichevsky notes: "We have become accustomed to thinking of action in the context of ethics, whereas in the context of aesthetics we think only in terms of observation or passive action".²⁰ The old ethical norm of "substance" and "content" makes way for a new aesthetic principle of "manner" and "form". In this sense, Berdichevsky adapted the Nietzschean existentialist concept of the "Will to Power" for his own purposes. *Macht* (power) became *Kraft* (force). Thus Berdichevsky joined a long line of culture critics who, at the turn of the century, used Nietzsche freely, drawing on him for their own nationalist purposes. Berdichevsky writes:

There comes a time for an individual and for a people, to live by the sword, by power and by the fist, by the vitality of being. This is the time of existence, of life - life itself. The sword is not a concept divorced from life or separate from it; it is the incarnation of life in its vitality and essence.²¹

The "new man" is alienated from historical culture and does not see himself as part of it. In Berdichevsky's words: "The living man takes

precedence over the heritage of his forefathers."²² If progress which is the outcome of the rationalist ideals falls, then myth rises. Myth, the fruit of existentialist perception, regulates the correct relationship between man and his world, between ethics and aesthetics, between the transient and the eternal. The new discourse has moved from the intellectual and historicist dimensions to that of the mythical and aesthetic. Myth is preferred to paralyzing history, because it encapsulates the unity of modern man and his world in an aesthetic and existential experience. This modernism was the result of early twentieth century thought which made a revolutionary use of myth.²³

The "new Hebrew" builds his modern world not through belief in progress (a kind of Jewish "evolutionism") but rather through a new myth. Berdichevsky sought to renew myth, to revolt against Ahad Ha-am's historicism, in order to achieve a revitalization of Jewish history. This explains why Berdichevsky devotes so much space in his work to Jewish mysticism – the *Kabbala* and *Hasidism* – as original syntheses of myth and Judaism. Ahad Ha-am, by contrast, represented the traditional conception defined by Gershom Scholem as "the general trend of classic Jewish tradition: the trend towards the destruction of the myth as the central spiritual force."²⁴

As the anthropologist Yonina Talmon pointed out, mythical time is essentially different from historical time.²⁵ Another Israeli professor, Shmuel Verses, demonstrated this very well when he distinguished between psychological and chronological time in Berdichevsky's writings.²⁶ To these distinctions, I would add that there is a dialectical connection between time in myth and historical time, and that each "time" designs the other in its own image. Time in myth tends to legitimize and preserve, while historical time tends to innovate in keeping with current changes, though, in order to do so, it necessitates the rewriting of time mythically. In all cultures, whether they include historiography or not, one may discern the events of the past, whether these are relevant or not to the present. As far as the living are concerned, there is no value in preserving tales of events which have no significance for the present in the collective consciousness. It is the myths that are important, not history. To quote Nietzsche:

Without myths, history loses its natural and healthy creative force. Only when the cultural horizon is comprised of myths does the process of cultural creation reach internal consolidation.²⁷

In the case of Berdichevsky, the mythological-synchronic past and the historical-diachronic past merge dialectically. The mythological past which Berdichevsky reveals, as a critic of culture, is intended to empower modern history – the period of the Hebrew renaissance – through the heroic myths of the past:

The people's heroes from past ages and their deeds, will serve as a symbol and a source of power for the generation to come, wherever they go and whatever they may have to overcome. The main thing is not simply to know one's origin, but to use this origin as the driving force in social and national life.²⁸

This is not the unity of continuity but rather the unity of rebellion.

Berdichevsky not only turned to the world of folk tales, of *Hasidism* and the *Kabbala*, but he was also attracted to the ancient Hebrews. In view of his secularism, his rebellion against Jewish history and his yearning for ancient myths, Berdichevsky could be seen as the father of the "Canaanite" movement ("Young Hebrews"). Indeed, as the Hebrew literary critic Baruch Kurzweil pointed out, the Canaanite movement was no more than "a logical and consistent conclusion of spiritual and aesthetic yearnings which have been present in our literature for a hundred years". Kurzweil, however, scorned the paradoxical attempt to blend modernity and myth, writing of the Canaanites: "Those who fight a bitter war against Judaism, in its entirety, in the name of modern progressive thought place themselves in a strange situation when they attempt to prove their realistic and practical sensibilities by mythological argumentation".

Berdichevsky and the "Young Hebrews" were the targets of attack long before Kurzweil appeared on the scene. One of the main protagonists was the critic Michael Rabinovitz, who published an article entitled "Judaism and the Superman" in Ahad Ha-am's journal *Ha-shiloah* in 1912. In his article, Rabinovitz wrote:

Nietzsche's theory, which captivates many hearts with its innovation, has reached our circles in recent years through our young writers who make frequent and impassioned use of Nietzsche's questionable innovations in order to make a new voice heard within the Jewish people. In so doing, they adopt a "total transvaluation" in our historical life.²⁹

The Hebrew Nietzschean, threatening a total transvaluation to the point of the nihilization of Jewish themes, was the target of many counter-attacks. The waves of controversy did not abate and the attacks were soon taken up by writers and public figures such as A. D. Gordon, Arieh Samiatzky, Moshe Glickson and Yechiel Halperin, as well as critics like Baruch Kurzweil, Abraham Sha'anani, Moshe Giora and Aliza Klausner-Eshkol. On the other hand, there were also critics who did not regard Berdichevsky as the Hebrew Nietzsche. Brenner refused to see him as "Nietzsche's student" merely because he used the term "transvaluation" – "a comparison which is like a blunt knife".³⁰ Similarly, Ya'akov Rabinowitz wondered: "Was he really a disciple of

Nietzsche? What does this tent-dweller have to do with the 'blond beast'? He learned from Nietzsche to negate, but he did not accept Nietzsche's positive views". Literary critics like Yitzhak Landan, Emanuel Ben-Gurion, Daniel Ben-Nahum, Dov Sadan, Alexander Barzel and Menachem Brinker all rejected the comparison between Berdichevsky and Nietzsche. But it is difficult to deny that Berdichevsky's double-edged message of anti-historical radicalism and the "new Hebrew" were the main axis of the "Young Hebrews" revolt.

ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF NIETZSCHE IN HEBREW CULTURE

The themes which marked the rebellion of the "Young Hebrews" led by Berdichevsky and Ehrenpreis were adopted by the Hebrew poets Saul Tchernichovsky (1875-1943) and Zalman Schneur (1886-1959) and creatively reworked in their poetry. They, too, put "life" before "literature". Their poems include many Nietzschean elements, particularly from his early period when Nietzsche took the Greek myths and the Dionysian paean to vitality as the antithesis to the paralyzing historical culture of nineteenth century Europe. Ahad Ha-am published only two of Tchernichovsky's poems in *Ha-shiloah*; however, when Klausner took over the helm in 1903, Tchernichovsky began to regularly contribute poems imbued with the spirit of vitalism. His main goal was to find in Judaism parallels for the Greek heroes ("Songs of the Exiles", "Facing the Sea"), such as Bar-Kochba.³¹ "Facing Apollo's Statue" (1899) is the most Nietzschean of his poems; in this respect, the motif "they bound him in the straps of phylacteries" recalls the stabbing of the bleeding Torah scroll by Berdichevsky's hero in his unpublished novel *The Leave Taker*.

Tchernichovsky does not merely suggest "a new function for poetry, but also has a recommendation for a new model of man", as the literary critic Yehudit Barel puts it. Kurzweil, who grapples with the dilemma of the "New Hebrew", stranded with his Judaism but devoid of a living G-d, argues that "Nietzsche's anti-Christian effect is now injected by Tchernichovsky into the enlightenment polemics of the Russian-Jewish writer, Y. L. Gordon". In this context, it is worth quoting Klausner, who felt that such Jewish enlightenment figures as Lilienblum, Mendele and Y. L. Gordon sought to create a new synthesis between religion and life. But it was a life of intellect and knowledge in keeping with European bourgeois rationalism and liberalism. By contrast, the war against Jewish tradition in the work of Tchernichovsky, Berdichevsky and Schneur was the war of the *mythos* against the *logos* – spirit and knowledge oppose life and the demand for life implies renewal through mythical and mystical powers.

Zalman Schneur who, in his poem "On the Banks of the Seine"

wrote that "G-d is dead, but man has not yet been resurrected" might be considered the greatest Nietzschean among the Hebrew renaissance poets. As in the case of Berdichevsky and Tchernichovsky, one also finds pagan rituals in Schneur's work ("Hidden Tablets") and the longing for beauty, in contrast to the culture of the priests and prophets: "What are you doing here, Creator of Beauty? You will never light a spark in the hearts of these shopkeepers". Schneur's poem "I Understand" is interesting in its approach to accepting the concept of the "Superman" in his poetry. "The fog cleared for me, and the ape rose up into a man".³²

In 1920, Y. H. Brenner criticized Schneur's "heroic" interpretation of Nietzsche, "as that of a militant journalist, who saw Nietzsche's rear but not his face."³³ Does Schneur also see the "Superman" as a still-unfulfilled promise? Regarding the attempts of Schneur and Tchernichovsky to rewrite Jewish history, the literary critic Menachem Brinker comments:

There can be no doubt that it was solely Nietzsche's influence that radicalized the conflict between past and present to the point of rejecting the past in the name of the needs of the present. In turn, this rejection led to a rejection of the collective tradition in the name of the cultural and instinctive needs of the modern Jewish individual.³⁴

In Europe, the appearance of Nietzsche's books was a powerful source of inspiration at a time when the universities were dominated by a positivism which left no room for intuition, emotion, or imagination. Nietzsche came as a breath of fresh air into an atmosphere dominated by pessimism, passivity and a sense of inertia. His calls for "transvaluation" seeped through into visions of a new order. It is hardly surprising that his opponents saw him as a demonic figure, the agent of the devil, a pioneer of immorality and a symptom of degeneration, all of which was asserted in Max Nordau's book *Degeneration* (1892) which was translated into Russian a year after it appeared.³⁵

Nietzschean concepts provided an intellectual framework for psychological and aesthetic speculations current at the time. The duality of his Dionysian and the Apollonian characterizations in *The Birth of Tragedy* promoted opposition to positivism and utilitarianism. The Dionysian served as a symbol for religious, psychological and aesthetic urges, becoming a window for the innermost needs of soul and spirit. Symbolists equated the spirit of music with Dionysus, unaware of the fact that Nietzsche had abandoned his admiration of Wagner. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* also attracted the symbolists because of its poetic language, aphoristic style and philosophical tone. The symbolists saw the book as a battle cry for individualism, scorning the masses and

rejecting socialization. They saw the artist as the "Superman" – apolitical and asocial, opposing materialism, intellect, positivism and optimism. For the symbolists, the artist's duty was solely to his own feelings and vision.

The desire to create a new humanity was particularly evident in the German avant-garde. Artists blurred traditional distinctions between left and right, rational and mystical, truth and lies, good and evil; each artist painted his visions in a different political colour. Why were artists attracted to Nietzsche? Like them, he saw the world as an artistic creation. "It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified".³⁶ The expressionist movement, which was founded in Dresden in 1905, drew its name from a concept which appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Elsewhere, the "Superman" is described as a bridge cast over a ravine. In a letter, Schmidt-Rodloff, tells his fellow expressionist painter, Nolde: "To draw together all the revolutionary and vibrant elements; this is what we mean by the word bridge". For the avant-garde, Nietzsche symbolized the new anti-historical radicalism. As the expressionist manifesto put it: "We, the youth who bear the future, want to create for ourselves physical and spiritual freedom in place of the values of the old establishment generation".³⁷

While David Frishman (1859-1922) – writer and critic, aesthete and translator – supported some of the ideals of the Hebrew revival movement, he rejected the Zionist movement, claiming that the Zionist idea was unworthy of realization. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was published in Hebrew for the first time in Frishman's translation during the years 1909-1911; firstly in *Reshafim* and then separately in the collection of Frishman's works. Frishman saw Nietzsche's work as a late biblical book – a "Third Testament" after the Old and New Testaments. His understanding was not far removed from that of Nietzsche himself, though the Nietzschean Zarathustra was aimed as a rebellion against Judeo-Christian ethics, in order to declare the birth of a new civilization. In Frishman's translation, the dissonant book became overtly harmonic and classical. Aesthetes such as Frishman, who sought to create the "new Hebrew" by placing him in opposition to the "Old Jew", took as their inspiration Hebrew history as expressed in the Bible, rather than the Diaspora period.

The first poem by Ya'akov Cohen (1881-1960), poet, playwright and translator, was published in Frishman's journal *Ha-dor* in 1901. Cohen proposed to create the "new Hebrew" and sought to illustrate this idea in the collection of that name which he edited in Warsaw in 1912. "The 'New Hebrew' will be the new human... The appearance of the New Hebrew will surely be splendid as he walks upright on his forefathers' land, the fresh, pure skies of the G-d of Renewal above his

head; proud and tall he will walk, like the ancient Hebrew".³⁸ Brenner would later criticize Ya'akov Cohen's Nietzschean pretensions in seeking to create the "New man", writing:

Who is this "New Hebrew?" ... Are they really fighting heroes? Is it really in distorted lines from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – we the few, we the geniuses, is this our force as we march to the future – can a war really be fought with such miserable weapons? ... Can the Hebrew revolution really be generated under such slogans – to destroy the Diaspora and all that comes from it?

Cohen's approach in his article "The Hebrew Revolution" (1912) supports modern Jewish nationalism as a *renaissance*, as the basis of all revival, its symbol, model and slogan. Cohen combined Nietzschean elements of renewal and autonomy with a return to the historical sources.

On the other hand, the organic nationalist perceptions of Johann Gottfried Herder had little impact on Zionism except for A. D. Gordon and Martin Buber. The Herderian vision did not appeal to Herzl. His world-view was liberal rather than organicist. In both concept and style, he and his followers were far removed from revolutionary or violent radicalism. Herzl mentions Nietzsche only once in his writings on 28 June 1895.³⁹ However, Max Nordau does certainly refer to Nietzsche in his book *Degeneration*, published in Berlin in 1892. More surprising is that Chaim Weizmann expressed his admiration for Nietzsche and warmly recommended his work in a letter to his future wife.⁴⁰ Ernst Mueller, in the official world organ of the Zionist movement⁴¹ and Gustav Witkovsky, in a German-Jewish Zionist journal, both referred to Nietzsche in clarifying fundamental issues in Zionism.⁴²

One of the most serious attempts in modern Hebrew literature to deal with Nietzschean problems was made by Yosef Haim Brenner (1881-1921). His heroes observe the meaninglessness of existence and their reflections are full of Nietzschean quotes and themes. In *Mi-saviv La-nekuda* (Around the Point), Abramson prefers insanity to suicide; Feuerman in *Ba-horef* (In Winter) expresses the choice as "Lose your mind or kill yourself; therefore choose death". Yehzekel Hefetz asks in *Shachol Ve-kishalon* (Bereavement and Failure): "Will he eventually find enough inner strength to uproot all this miserable hell within through redeeming nothingness?" Two literary characters can be found in Brenner's stories who have a profound relationship to Nietzsche: Lapidot in *Mi-kan U-mikan* (From Here and There) is an artistic representation of A. D. Gordon and the ideal of labour Zionism which purifies; Uriel Davidovsky in *Mi-saviv La-nekuda* (Around the Point) is a portrait of Sander Baum, Brenner's friend. Baum, Brenner, and the

cultural critic Hillel Zeitlin were the main core of the Nietzsche Circle in Homel at the turn of the century. The history of this circle is an enlightening example of how each shade of opinion in the group drew its ideological justification from a Nietzschean theme.

To understand the spiritual background one needs to recall that from the 1860s onwards, the Russian intelligentsia had been characterized by extreme atheism. Comments such as "if G-d exists, then man is a slave" or "the yearning for destruction is also the creative yearning", anticipated similar remarks by Nietzsche. From Pushkin and Lermontov to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the main issue in Russian literature was the meaning and purpose of life. Harbingers of Nietzsche can also be found in Dostoevsky's characters, Kirilov and Raskolnikov. But it is Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891) who is considered the quintessential "Russian Nietzsche" because of his aesthetic and elitist approach, his scorn for democracy and his amoral attitudes.

Alongside the Russian variant of Nietzschean atheism, there also developed in *fin-de-siècle* Russia a "new religious consciousness". Dmitri S. Merezhkovsky adopted an apocalyptic interpretation of Christianity which included a Third Covenant or Third Coming. Influenced by the Nietzschean critique of traditional Christianity, Merezhkovsky yearned for a new form of the religion which would encourage cultural and aesthetic creativity, individualism and self-expression. Lev Shestov, a leading figure in the religious renaissance, was attracted for his part, by Nietzsche's "critique of intellect". In his essay "The Good in the Teaching of Count Tolstoy and Nietzsche" (1900), he attacked philosophical idealism and rationalism. Critical of Tolstoy and his moralism, Shestov claimed that tragedy, evil and suffering are inevitable. In his book *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy* (1903), he argued that both thinkers had engaged in a similar attack on rationalism. In later essays, he claimed that there are no eternal truths, that good and evil are always present in humanity and that the role of philosophy is not to reach a compromise but to stimulate a struggle for the impossible.

Jewish cultural critics wrote and philosophized against the backdrop of this general intellectual atmosphere in turn-of-the-century Eastern Europe, particularly Russia. Hillel Zeitlin (1877-1942) was profoundly influenced by Shestov's thought. Zeitlin, a Yiddish publicist with a tendency to mysticism derived from his Hasidic upbringing, moved to Homel and was sent by the town as a delegate to the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901. His preference for the people of Israel over the Land of Israel led him to support the Uganda Plan and four years later he published a comprehensive monograph on Nietzsche in *Ha-zman*. His work is not just another attempt to inform the Hebrew reader of Nietzsche's theories (as Neumark had already done) but a

conscious expression of attraction to his personality which seemed to him that of a great man who had undergone an "inner holy experience". In 1919, Zeitlin published a further essay entitled "Superman or Supergod" in which he sought to repent his youthful follies by painting Nietzsche's ideas in a religious and mystical light, remarking: "One should progress from the 'Superman' to the 'Supergod'".⁴³ In this context, the attraction of religious thinkers to Nietzsche is fascinating. The interest of Neumark, Zeitlin, Rav Kook, Martin Buber and today, of Ariele Leib Weisfish from ultra-orthodox Mea-Shearim, reflects the affinity between religious existential discourse and the father of modern secular existentialism.

Hasidism and the *Kabbalah* were two modern attempts to revitalize Judaism by renewing it through myth. Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem are each related to one of these historic phenomena, granting a central status to myth in their research. The revolutionary nature of their approach is reflected mainly in their critique of the assumption that saw Judaism as an essentially anti-mystical religion, resolved as Gershom Scholem put it, to eliminate myth. Both scholars broke with tradition by perceiving myth as an innovative factor in traditional Judaism. Nietzsche exerted a significant influence in shaping the approach of Buber and Scholem to myth, rehabilitating it as a vital and creative element in all societies. It is instructive to read Scholem's comments regarding Nietzsche's influence on Buber:

Alongside his analysis of mysticism as a social factor in Judaism, Buber developed a no less keen interest in its mythical foundations which related to a change in appreciating the vital nature of myth. This change of assessment, common to many of Buber's generation, was the result of Nietzsche's influence.⁴⁴

It is possible that Gershom Scholem may here be revealing something about himself. He, too, assigned Nietzsche a central role in re-evaluating myth. In this context, it should be noted that Scholem, together with Mircea Eliade, the famous writer on comparative religions and also the depth psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, participated in the "Eranos Circle" which stressed the centrality of myth in understanding religious and cultural phenomena.

Nietzsche's well-known declaration about the "Death of G-d" does not contradict the religious dimension of his thought. *Zarathustra* itself is written in a biblical vein. Nietzsche, who sought to create "new tablets of the law", placed Dionysus in opposition to Jesus, at the same time enthroning the "Superman". The theologian Hans Galwitz who combined Protestantism with Nietzscheanism, even asserted that the combative values of Nietzsche were the very heart of authentic Christianity. Gallwitz entitled his essay "Friedrich Nietzsche as an

Educator for Christianity". Albert Kalthoff (1850-1906) was an even more fervent advocate of the absorption of Nietzsche into the Protestant Church. Primitive Christianity and Nietzsche shared, he believed, the common radical urge of seeking to change all values.

In 1895, the young Martin Buber, like many of his generation, was no less excited by Nietzsche's writings, even translating into Polish the first section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.⁴⁵ Buber wrote: "This book did not influence me as a gift might but as an invasion which robbed me of my liberty and it was a long time before I could free myself from it". Indeed, the importance of Nietzsche for Buber extends right through his life, including his essay on "Nietzsche's Theory of Man" [*Gilyonot*, 1937] and the chapter "Feuerbach and Nietzsche" in his Hebrew book *The Faces of Man*. Again, as with many of his generation, Buber's enthusiasm for the First World War was due in part to his attraction for Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie*.⁴⁶ It should be remembered that together with Goethe's *Faust* and the New Testament, *Zarathustra* became one of the most popular works in Germany during the war. In 1917, 40,000 copies of the book were sold. Ironically, *Zarathustra* took its place on the battlefield alongside the Bible and thus the author of *The Anti-Christ* found himself once more side by side with the Holy Scriptures.

Buber, Scholem and Shmuel Hugo Bergman were all members of the pacifist Palestinian Jewish organization *Brit Shalom*, which advocated a bi-national state. Bergman wrote a number of articles on A. D. Gordon which show Nietzschean influences, the first of which was entitled "A. D. Gordon's Polemic with Nietzsche".⁴⁷ Gordon, the labour Zionist ideologue of the Second *Aliya*, joined in the debate about Nietzsche that was taking place in Hebrew culture at the beginning of the century. In a letter to Brenner, he had declared himself a member of the nation that invented the morality of slaves. In his article "Assessing Ourselves", Gordon attacked Ahad Ha-am for neglecting to draw the logical conclusions from his debate with Berdichevsky. "Ahad Ha-am failed to finish what he had started; he moved over to the 'morality of Judaism' and ended up with 'Torah from Zion'". A. D. Gordon condemned those Hebrew writers who, "hypnotized by Europe", wish to become like the others:

Berdichevsky comes along and confounds not Nietzsche's position – far from it – but fathers his own. Instead of studying the way of Nietzsche the individual, instead of discovering new horizons, depth and light, he simply accepts Nietzsche's theory, like all those who accept a theory from anyone who would give them one and with all his soul he becomes no more than an interpretation of Nietzsche's ego.⁴⁸

A. D. Gordon believed that Nietzsche above all set a personal example and had cast a new light on higher morality. To the extent that Gordon was influenced by the psychology and philosophy of the unconscious laid out by Jung and Henri Bergson, and also by *Kabbalistic* or transcendental phenomena, he spoke as a mystic and not as psychologist. Gordon developed a new ethics which represented a transition from the Nietzschean "Superman" to the Gordonian version of the "Holy Man". In his concept of the "religion of labour", Gordon linked the creative man with his creation and in his concept of the "man-nation" (a social extension of the notion of the "superholy man") he linked the creative Jewish man with his human destiny. Gordon expanded his interpretation of the Nietzschean "Superman" into a Zionist social framework with a national and universal goal.

Gordon had fled from the decadence of European bourgeois culture at the age of 47 to begin a new and creative life in the Land of Israel. He argued that the purely intellectual consciousness was sovereign only over an artificial culture and that the old standards of bourgeois morality that Nietzsche was so eager to destroy, had become bankrupt. Henceforth, man will be judged by a new standard: expansion or contraction. The "vital consciousness" is aware of the fact that man or society, especially in crisis, longs for the solution of *authenticity* – the desire to return to one's own people, the wish to be at home with oneself. Gordon and Brenner both attempted to realize this conception, in a practical way, through pioneering activity in the Land of Israel.

Pioneers of the Second *Aliya*, in responding to Nietzsche, were mindful of the precarious nature of their own existence. Unlike the "young Hebrews" in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, A. D. Gordon felt, for example, that existence could not be based solely on "smashing the old Man", because this was just a slogan and an escape from authenticity. Nietzsche would remain an important thinker for some Zionist socialists coping with the crisis of values in society, with the proper balance between individualism and collectivism within the kibbutz and with the need for a theory of will. Nietzsche was studied intensively by members of *Ha-shomer Ha-tzair* and of the *Gedud Ha-avoda* (Labour Battalion). There was also a "Nietzsche Circle" which functioned within the literary societies of the kibbutzim even in the 1970s.

Significant Nietzschean themes can equally be found in Revisionist Zionism, including its leader, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the nationalist poet, Uri Zvi Greenberg and the right-wing ideologue, Israel Eldad. Nietzsche's name crops up frequently in their discussions. In his autobiography, Jabotinsky noted the enormous influence exerted by European culture on himself and the "Hebrew Circle" in which he participated as a youth, where "we used to debate Nietzsche and moral questions – not the future of Judaism".⁴⁹ In 1899, Jabotinsky confessed

his admiration for Maxim Gorky - "an echo of Nietzsche's theory in Russian garb" - a theory which brought "glory to men of will and action and scorn for those enslaved by the sterile reflex which stunts any act of daring".

Jabotinsky recounted how a group of friends, gathered at a summer resort, had to choose 10 books to be saved from a fire. One of the group said: "I confess that among the ten books to be saved from the fire there must be one written by a harbinger of the strong personality ... Therefore we should prefer Gorky". The selection of the books served as the pretext for a discussion of forceful personalities. "We all indulge in dreams of a strong, dominant personality; we are all longing for its arrival on the stage of history ... so that each individual can, on the new soil, develop into a bold personality". Needless to say, Nietzsche's name was raised in the debate and accompanied the discussion of the strong personality.

Extensive evidence can be found in Jabotinsky's writings of his deep affinity with Nietzsche's innovative philosophy. In his article "On America", he poses the question: "Who in our youth was the teacher and prophet of all the troublemakers, who carries the blame (or the credit) for all the fires now burning down the fences of our world?" He immediately answers his own question. "His name was Nietzsche. He emerged from the narrow straits not in terms of conscience and experience, but in the domain of morality, duty, good and evil".⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Jabotinsky writes: "A long line of great thinkers and intellectuals paved the path away from the attitude that everything is 'alright' (Jabotinsky uses the English term) to the approach which now prevails, of wondering, experimenting, changing. This line includes such giants as Nietzsche, Ibsen and Bergson". There are just a few of the instances where Jabotinsky's respect for Nietzsche is evident; the writings of the father of Revisionist Zionism include such obviously Nietzschean themes as the tension between power and morality, the centrality of ceremony and drama, the aesthetic experience of might and the desire for a new man.

Another Nietzschean was Uri Zvi Greenberg, the great Hebrew poet, who immigrated to Palestine in 1924. Two years later, at the age of 30, he published his book *Ha-gavrut Ha-olah* (The Rising Masculinity). In contrast to *Great Fear and Moon* and his early Yiddish poetry, in which he rejected his Judaism, *The Rising Masculinity* is a collection of existential poems praising Jewish values and symbols. "While there I turned my back on my earlocked Jewish brothers ... Here, from a distance, during the days of Hebrew purification on the land of this race and amidst the divinity of Jerusalem, here, by G-d, I shall not turn my back on my earlocked brothers". Uri Zvi Greenberg despised Christian Europe and hated the Latin script. "What if I saw

Nietzsche's vision of the Superman in these letters?"⁵¹ His poetry is saturated with the Nietzschean *Lebensphilosophie* though unlike Berdichevsky and the "Young Hebrews", who sought to Europeanize Jewish culture, in the case of Greenberg the central thrust is directed *against* European culture. Elsewhere, in his poem, "Shir Ha-ugavar" ("Song of the Organist") Greenberg's yearning rises above mountains and lights, seeking to turn in Nietzschean fashion the Jew into the most elevated of beings.

In 1944, the centennial of Nietzsche's birth, Israel Eldad - a leading thinker and activist of the Hebrew underground revolt against British mandatory rule in Palestine (who would later become Nietzsche's translator into Hebrew) invoked the German philosopher's name in his appeal to his countrymen. He called on Hebrew youth to elevate itself "to the same heights as Zarathustra, in the pure, sharp air - not only for aesthetic pleasure, but also for instruction: To learn what it means to be a free man".⁵² The article, entitled "Substance and Veneer in the Philosophy of Nietzsche", does not, of course, carry its author's name since it was published in the underground magazine of the LEHI ("Fighters for the Freedom of Israel"). The LEHI leader, Yair, (Avraham Stern), was also a Nietzschean and authored "The Principles of Rebirth", the manifesto of this extremist underground movement. Yair's Sixth Principle clearly carries the fingerprints of the Nietzschean Eldad:

Together with this courage to cast life aside in time of battle... "to go happily towards death" - alongside this, an entire world of dancers and poets stand in amazement in the face of the powerful will for life inherent in the bodies of the tortured and the oppressed. You shall live therein, not die therein: And you shall choose life.

Nietzsche's name even became embroiled in the controversy that engulfed the Jewish community in Palestine following the murder of Lord Moyne by LEHI activists. At a meeting of the inner cabinet of the Zionist Executive in 1944, a leading Labour leader, Elyahu Golomb, linked the assassination of Lord Moyne to the admiration felt by LEHI and by Eldad in particular, for the Nietzschean concept of the "Superman". Eldad's "new Hebrew" sought, he alleged, to create an impossible link between Nietzscheanism and Hebrew nationalism. Eldad had therefore always preferred Berdichevsky's "wisdom of life" to Ahad Ha-am's "professional wisdom". Berdichevsky alone had truly managed to ascend to Nietzschean solitude. For Eldad, he was closer to the truth than Ahad Ha-am. While Eldad is usually considered an integral nationalist, it would probably be more accurate to see him, like Berdichevsky, as part of the category of "individual nationalism".

His ideology was a form of nationalism which emphasized the importance of the individual, of style and existential experience.⁵³

The fate of Berdichevsky in Hebrew culture had some parallels to that of Nietzsche in European thought – both became a public myth in the collective memory. This makes it easier to understand how Nietzsche and Berdichevsky could have been adopted by diverse ideological camps, who sought to create the “Superman” or the “new Hebrew” in their own image. The efficacy of Nietzsche in this regard was due mainly to his style and this is probably the key to his enormous influence on writers, thinkers and artists. In this sense, Nietzsche was an inveterate modern, since modernism is “more a search for style than any particular style”.⁵⁴ Berdichevsky eventually abandoned Nietzsche, just as one discards a ladder which is no longer needed. The literary critic, Lahover, relates that Berdichevsky was grateful to him for cleansing him of his “original sin with Nietzsche”.

A chronological and thematic examination of the influence exerted by Nietzsche, one of the major philosophers of modern times, on the emergence of Zionism may hold important lessons for grasping the pattern of its ideological development. In this article I have attempted to raise some key points in the history of the reception of Nietzsche in modern Hebrew culture, concentrating on fundamental debates: tradition versus innovation, particularism versus universalism, individualism versus collectivism and the “new Hebrew” versus the Jew. Such tensions accompanied modern Jewish nationalism from the outset and fuelled the development of myths which were often refined in the crucible of Nietzschean categories.

NOTES

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